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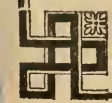
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CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

FROM PRINCETON REVIEW.

THE past year has been one of great anxiety for the peace and union of our country. The danger, though greatly lessened, cannot be considered as entirely passed. There is still great dissatisfaction both at the north and south with regard to what are called "The compromise measures," adopted by Congress at its late session. We hope and believe that the great body of people in every part of the Union are disposed to acquiesce in those measures, and to carry them faithfully into effect. Still the agitation continues. At the South there is in the minds of many, a sense of injustice and of insecurity; and at the North not a few have conscientious objections to one at least of the peace measures above alluded to. This difficulty is not to be obviated by mutual criminations. The South will not be pacified by calling their demands for what they deem justice, treasonable; nor the North by announcing their opposition to the fugitive slave bill, as fanaticism. Both parties must be satisfied. The one must be shown that no injustice is designed or impending; and the other must be convinced that they can with a good conscience submit to the law for the delivery of fugitive slaves.

Every candid man must admit that the violent de-

nunciation of slave-holders, in which a certain class of northern writers habitually indulge, it not merely irritating and offensive, but in a high degree unjust and injurious. It is an evil of which the South have a right to complain. But it is to be considered that it is an evil incident to our free institutions, and cannot be prevented without destroying the liberty of speech and of the press. It is an evil for which secession or separation of the Union is no remedy, but would prove a great aggravation. It is moreover not the offence of the North but a small class of northern men. It is no more to be imputed to the whole people, than similar disparaging and injurious representations emanating from southern men against northern institutions, are to be imputed to the whole South. Though therefore we admit the injustice of the denunciations in question they are not a grievance which ought to disturb the peace of the country.

Again, candid men must admit that the South has a right to complain of the facilities afforded for the escape of slaves, and the difficulties thrown in the way of their recapture. But this is an injustice which the North has, by the action of their representatives in congress, shown every disposition to abate. And it is moreover an evil, which as Mr. Clay remarked in his place in the Senate, is almost exclusively confined to the border slaveholding states.

The great ground of complaint, however, at the South, so far as we can understand, is that the equilibrium between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states in the Senate, has been destroyed by the admission of California into the Union. A certain class of southern politicians seem to think that justice requires

that there should be perfect equality in the senatorial representation between the two sections of the country ; and consequently that the South should have the half of all new territory acquired, and that whenever a free state is admitted to the Union provision should be made for the admission of a slaveholding state to counter-balance it. This demand we are satisfied cannot appear reasonable to the great majority of the people. It is equivalent to a demand that one-third of the population should have a representation equal to the remaining two-thirds. Justice surely does not require this in a republic whose fundamental principle is that representation should be in proportion to the population. Nor does the security of the South require this arrangement. A retrospect of the history of our congressional proceedings, proves that there is neither the disposition nor the power on the part of the North to interfere with the rights of the South. It is an established law in all free government that a compact minority holds the balance of power, and controls the action of the government. The South has long been in the minority, and yet our history clearly shows that their influence has always predominated in our general councils. They have had a majority of the leading offices of the government, and of the members of the Supreme Court. They have determined all the great questions of our foreign and domestic policy. This must continue to be the case ; for the causes which have determined this course of action are permanent. In Pennsylvania the Germans, though not one-third of the inhabitants of that state, have for generations had the balance of power in their hands and given character to its politics and policy. We are satisfied that a calm examination

of the past, and a careful consideration of the principles which control the action of the government, and especially the limited nature of its powers, must convince the South that they are in no danger of suffering injustice from the North, and that the evils incident to all human institutions, and especially to the confederation of so many states differing so much and so variously from each other, would be aggravated a thousand fold by a dissolution of the Union. Men might as well prescribe decapitation for the head-ache, as the destruction of the confederacy as a cure for the present difficulties. No human mind can estimate and no human tongue express the evils to be anticipated to the prosperity, the morals, the religion of the country, and to the hopes of the world from such a catastrophe as the breaking up of this confederacy. It is no wonder then that the remote fear of such an event has roused the whole country, and called forth from the pulpit, the press, and the forum so many addresses to the wisdom, patriotism, and brotherly-love of the people.

There is no more obvious duty, at the present time, resting on American Christians, ministers and people, than to endeavour to promote kind feelings between the South and the North. All fierce addresses to the passions, on either side, are fratricidal. It is an offence against the gospel, against our common country, and against God. Every one should endeavour to diffuse right principles, and thus secure right feeling and action, under the blessing of God in every part of the land.

If the South has no such grounds of complaint as would justify them before God and the human race, whose trustees in one important sense they are, in dissolving the Union, how is it with the North? Are they

justifiable in the violent resistance to the fugitive slave bill, which been threatened or attempted? This opposition in a great measure has been confined to the abolitionists as a party, and as such they are a small minority of the people. They have never included in their ranks either the controlling intellect or moral feeling at the North. Their fundamental principle is anti-scriptural and therefore irreligious. They assume that slaveholding is sinful. This doctrine is the life of the sect. It has no power over those who reject that principle, and therefore it has not gained ascendancy over those whose faith is governed by the word of God.

The real strength of the abolitionists as a party may be estimated from its representatives in our national councils. Two or three Senators and a dozen or less members of the House of Representatives are all it can boast of. We have ever maintained that the proper method of opposing this party, and of counteracting its pernicious influence was to exhibit clearly the falsehood of its one idea, viz: that slaveholding is a sin against God. To this object we have devoted several articles in the preceding numbers of our journal. The discussion has now taken a new turn. It is assumed that the law of the last Congress relating to fugitive slaves is unconstitutional, or if not contrary to the constitution, contrary to the law of God. Under this impression many who have never been regarded as abolitionists, have entered their protest against the law, and some in their haste have inferred from its supposed unconstitutionality or immorality that it ought to be openly resisted. It is obvious that the proper method of dealing with the subject in this new aspect, is to demonstrate that the law in question is according to the constitution

of the land; that it is not inconsistent with the divine law; or, admitting its unconstitutionality or immorality, that the resistance recommended is none the less a sin against God. We do not propose to discuss either of the two former of these propositions. The constitutionality of the law may safely be left in the hands of the constituted authorities. It is enough for us that there is no flagrant and manifest inconsistency between the law and the constitution; that the first legal authorities in the land pronounce them perfectly consistent; and that there is no difference in principle between the present law and that of 1793 on the same subject, in which the whole country has acquiesced for more than half a century. We would also say that after having read some of the most laboured disquisitions designed to prove that the fugitive slave bill subverts the fundamental principles of our federal compact, we have been unable to discover the least force in the arguments adduced.

As to the immorality of the law, so far as we can discover, the whole stress of the argument in the affirmative rests on two assumptions. First, that the law of God in Deuteronomy, expressly forbids the restoration of a fugitive slave to his owner; and secondly, that slavery itself being sinful, it must be wrong to enforce the claims of the master to the service of the slave. As to the former of these assumptions, we would simply remark, that the venerable Prof. Stuart in his recent work, "Conscience and the Constitution," has clearly proved that the law in Deuteronomy has no application to the present case. The thing there forbidden is the restoration of a slave who had fled from a heathen master and taken refuge among the worshippers of the true God. Such a man was not to be forced back into hea-

thenism. This is the obvious meaning and spirit of the command. That it had no reference to slaves who had escaped from Hebrew masters and fled from one tribe or city to another, is plain from the simple fact that the Hebrew laws recognised slavery. It would be a perfect contradiction if the law authorized the purchase and holding of slaves, and yet forbid the enforcing the right of possession. There could be no such thing as slavery, in such a land as Palestine, if the slave could recover his liberty by simply moving from one tribe to another over an imaginary line, or even from the house of his master to that of his next neighbour. Besides, how inconsistent is it in the abolitionists in one breath to maintain that the laws of Moses did not recognise slavery, and in the next, that the laws about the restoration of slaves referred to the slaves of Hebrew masters. According to their doctrine, there could be among the Israelites no slaves to restore. They must admit either that the law of God allowed the Hebrews to hold slaves, and then there is an end to their arguments against the sinfulness of slaveholding; or acknowledge that the law respecting the restoration of slaves referred only to fugitives from the heathen, and then there is an end to their argument from this enactment against the law under consideration.

The way in which abolitionists treat the scriptures makes it evident that the command in Deuteronomy is urged not so much out of regard to the authority of the word of God, as an argumentum ad hominem. Wherever the scriptures either in the Old or New Testament recognise the lawfulness of holding slaves, they are tortured without mercy to force from them a different response; and where, as in this case, they appear to favour

the other side of the question, abolitionists quote them rather to silence those who make them the rule of their faith, than as the ground of their own convictions. Were there no such law as that in Deuteronomy in existence, or were there a plain injunction to restore a fugitive from service to his Hebrew master, it is plain from their principles that they would none the less fiercely condemn the law under consideration. Their opposition is not founded on the scriptural command. It rests on the assumption that the master's claim is iniquitous and ought not to be enforced.* Their objections are not to the mode of delivery, but the delivery itself. Why else quote the law in Deuteronomy which apparently forbids such surrender of the fugitive to his master? It is clear that no effective enactment could be framed on this subject which would not meet with the same opposition. We are convinced, by reading the discussions on this subject, that the immorality attributed to the fugitive

* In the New York Independent for January 2, 1851, there is a sermon delivered by Rev. Richard S. Storrs, Jr., of Brooklyn, Dec. 12, 1850, in which his opposition to the fugitive slave bill is expressly placed on the injustice of slavery. He argues the matter almost exclusively on that ground. "To what," he asks, "am I required to send this man [the slave] back? To a system which . . . no man can contemplate without shuddering." Again, "Why shall I send the man to this unjust bondage? The fact that he has suffered it so long already, is a reason why I should not. . . . Why shall I not help him, in his struggle for the rights which God gave him indelibly, when he made him a man? There is nothing to prevent, but the simple requirement of my equals in the state; the parchment of the law, which they have written." This is an argument against the constitution and not against the fugitive slave law. It is an open refusal to comply with one of the stipulations of our national compact. If it has any force, it is in favour of the dissolution of the union. Nay, if the argument is sound it makes the dissolution of the union inevitable and obligatory. It should, therefore, in all fairness be presented in that light, and not as an argument against the law of Congress. Let it be understood that the ground now assumed is that the constitution cannot be complied with. Let it be seen that the moralists of our day have discovered that the compact framed by our fathers, which all our public men in the general and state governments have sworn to support, under which we have lived sixty years, and whose fruits we have so abundantly enjoyed, is an immoral compact, and must be repudiated from a sense of duty to God. This is the real doctrine constantly presented in the abolition prints; and if properly understood we should soon see to what extent it commends itself to the judgment and conscience of the people.

slave law resolves itself into the assumed immorality of slaveholding. No man would object to restoring an apprentice to his master; and no one would quote scripture or search for arguments to prove it sinful to restore a fugitive slave, if he believed slaveholding to be lawful in the sight of God. This being the case we feel satisfied that the mass of the people at the north, whose conscience and action are ultimately determined by the teaching of the Bible, will soon settle down into the conviction that the law in question is not in conflict with the law of God.

But suppose the reverse to be the fact; suppose it clearly made out that the law passed by Congress in reference to fugitive slaves is contrary to the constitution or to the law of God, what is to be done? What is the duty of the people under such circumstances? The answers given to this question are different, and some of them so portentous that the public mind has been aroused and directed to the consideration of the nature of civil government and of the grounds and limits of the obedience due to laws of the land. As this is a subject not merely of general interest at this time, but of permanent importance, we purpose to devote to its discussion the few following pages.

Our design is to state in a few words in what sense government is a divine institution, and to draw from that doctrine the principles which must determine the nature and limits of the obedience which is due to the laws of the land.

That the Bible, when it asserts that all power is of God, or that the powers that be are ordained of God, does not teach that any one form of civil government has been divinely appointed as universally obligatory, is

plain because the scriptures contain no such prescription. There are no directions given as to the form which civil governments shall assume. All the divine commands on this subject, are as applicable under one form as another. The direction is general : Obey the powers that be. The proposition is unlimited : All power is of God ; i. e. government, whatever its form, is of God. He has ordained it. The most pointed scriptural injunctions on this subject were given during the usurped or tyrannical reign of military despots. It is plain that the sacred writers did not, in such passages, mean to teach that a military despotism was the form of government which God had ordained as of perpetual and universal obligation. As the Bible enjoins no one form, so the people of God in all ages, under the guidance of his Spirit, have lived with a good conscience, under all the diversities of organization of which human government is susceptible.

Again, as no one form of government is prescribed, so neither has God determined preceptively who are to exercise civil power. He has not said that such power must be hereditary, and descend on the principle of primogeniture. He has not determined whether it shall be confined to males to the exclusion of females ; or whether all offices shall be elective. These are not matters of divine appointment, and are not included in the proposition that all power is of God. Neither is it included in this proposition that government is in such a sense ordained of God that the people have no control in the matter. The doctrine of the Bible is not inconsistent with the right of the people, as we will endeavour to show in the sequel, to determine their own form of government and to select their own rulers.

When it is said government is of God, we understand the scriptures to mean, first, that it is a divine institution and not a mere social compact. It does not belong to the category of voluntary associations such as men form for literary, benevolent, or commercial purposes. It is not optional with men whether government shall exist. It is a divine appointment, in the same sense as marriage and the church are divine institutions. The former of these is not a mere civil contract, nor is the church as a visible spiritual community a mere voluntary society. Men are under obligation to recognise its existence, to join its ranks, and submit to its laws. In like manner it is the will of God that civil government should exist. Men are bound by his authority to have civil rulers for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well. This is the scriptural doctrine as opposed to the deistical theory of a social compact as the ultimate ground of all human governments.

It follows from this view of the subject, that obedience to the laws of the land is a religious duty, and disobedience is of the specific nature of sin; this is a principle of vast importance. It is true that the law of God is so broad that it binds a man to every thing that is right, and forbids every thing that is wrong; and consequently that every violation even of a voluntary engagement is of the nature of an offence against God. Still there is a wide difference between disobedience to an obligation voluntarily assumed, and which has no other sanction than our own engagement, and disregard of an obligation directly imposed of God. St. Peter recognises this distinction when he said to Ananias, Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God.

All lying is sinful, but lying to God is a higher crime than lying unto men. There is greater irreverence and contempt of the divine presence and authority, and a violation of an obligation of a higher order. Every man feels that the marriage vows have a sacred character which could not belong to them, if marriage was merely a civil contract. In like manner the divine institution of government elevates it into the sphere of religion, and adds a new and higher sanction to the obligations which it imposes. There is a specific difference, more easily felt than described, between what is religious and what is merely moral; between disobedience to man and resistance to an ordinance of God.

A third point included in the scriptural doctrine on this subject, is that the actual existence of any government creates the obligation of obedience. That is, the obligation does not rest either on the origin or the nature of the government, or on the mode in which it is administered. It may be legitimate or revolutionary, despotic or constitutional, just or unjust, so long as it exists it is to be recognised and obeyed within its proper sphere. The powers that be are ordained of God in such sense that the possession of power is to be referred to his providence. It is not by chance, nor through the uncontrolled agency of men, but by divine ordination that any government exists. The declaration of the apostle just quoted was uttered under the reign of Nero. It is as true of his authority as of that of the Queen of England, or of that of our own President, that it was of God. He made Nero emperor. He required all within the limits of the Roman Empire to recognise and obey him so long as he was allowed to occupy the throne. It was not necessary for the early Christians

to sit in judgment on the title of every new emperor, whenever the pretorian guards chose to put down one and put up another; neither are God's people now in various parts of the world called upon to discuss the titles and adjudicate the claims of their rulers. The possession of civil power is a providential fact, and is to be regarded as such. This does not imply that God approves of every government which he allows to exist. He permits oppressive rulers to bear sway, just as he permits famine and pestilence to execute his vengeance. A good government is a blessing, a bad government is a judgment; but the one as much as the other is ordained of God, and is to be obeyed not only for fear but also for conscience sake.

A fourth principle involved in the proposition that all power is of God, is, that the magistrate is invested with a divine right. He represents God. His authority is derived from Him. There is a sense in which he represents the people and derives from them his power; but in a far higher sense he is the minister of God. To resist him is to resist God, and "they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation." Thus said the scriptures. It need hardly be remarked that this principle relates to the nature, and not to the extent, of the power of the magistrate. It is as true of the lowest as of the highest; of a justice of the peace as of the President of the United States; of a constitutional monarch as of an absolute sovereign. The principle is that the authority of rulers is divine, and not human, in its origin. They exercise the power which belongs to them of divine right. The reader, we trust, will not confound this doctrine with the old doctrine of "the divine right of kings." The two things are as dif-

ferent as day and night. We are not for reviving a defunct theory of civil government; a theory which perished, at least among Anglo Saxons, at the expulsion of James II. from the throne of England. That monarch took it with him into exile, and it lies entombed with the last of the Stuarts. According to that theory God had established the monarchial form of government as universally obligatory. There could not consistently with his law be any other. The people had no more right to renounce that form of government than the children of a family have to resolve themselves into a democracy. In the second place, it assumed that God had determined the law of succession as well as the form of government. The people could not change the one any more than the other; or any more than children could change their father, or a wife her husband. And thirdly, as a necessary consequence of these principles, it inculcated in all cases the duty of passive obedience. The king holding his office immediately from God, held it entirely independent of the will of the people, and his responsibility was to God alone. He could not forfeit his throne by any injustice however flagrant. The people if in any case they could not obey, were obliged to submit; resistance or revolution was treason against God. We have already remarked that the scriptural doctrine is opposed to every one of these principles. The Bible does not prescribe any one form of government; it does not determine who shall be depositories of civil power; and it clearly recognises the right of revolution. In asserting, therefore, the divine right of rulers, we are not asserting any doctrine repudiated by our forefathers, or inconsistent with civil liberty in its widest rational extent.

Such, as we understand it, is the true nature of civil government. It is a divine institution and not a mere voluntary compact. Obedience to the magistrate and laws is a religious duty; and disobedience is a sin against God. This is true of all forms of government. Men living under the Turkish Sultan are bound to recognise his authority, as much as the subjects of a constitution monarch, or the fellow citizens of an elected president, are bound to recognise their respective rulers. All power is of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God, in such sense that all magistrates are to be regarded as his ministers, acting in his name and with his authority, each within his legitimate sphere; beyond which he ceases to be a magistrate.

That this is the doctrine of the scriptures on this subject can hardly be doubted. The Bible never refers to the consent of the governed, the superiority of the rulers, or to the general principles of expediency, as the ground of our obligation to the higher powers. The obedience which slaves owe their masters, children their parents, wives their husbands, people their rulers, is always made to rest on the divine will as its ultimate foundation. It is part of the service which we owe to God. We are required to act, in all these relations, not as men-pleasers, but as the servants of God. All such obedience terminates on our Master who is in heaven. This gives the sublimity of spiritual freedom even to the service of a slave. It is not in the power of man to reduce to bondage those who serve God, in all the service they render their fellow-men. The will of God, therefore, is the fountain of our obligation to obey the laws of the land. His will, however, is not an arbitrary determination; it is the expression of infinite

intelligence and love. There is the most perfect agreement between all the precepts of the Bible and the highest dictates of reason. There is no command in the word of God of permanent and universal obligation, which may not be shown to be in accordance with the laws of our own higher nature. This is one of the strongest collateral arguments in favour of the divine origin of the scriptures. In appealing therefore to the Bible in support of the doctrine here advanced, we are not, on the one hand appealing to an arbitrary standard, a mere statute-book, a collection of laws which create the obligations they enforce; nor, on the other hand, to "the reason and nature of things" in the abstract, which after all is only our own reason; but we are appealing to the infinite intelligence of a personal God, whose will because of his infinite excellence, is necessarily the ultimate ground and rule of all moral obligation. This however, being the case, whatever the Bible declares to be right is found to be in accordance with the constitution of nature and our own reason. All that the scriptures, for example, teach of the subordination of children to their parents, of wives to their husbands, has not its foundation, but its confirmation, in the very nature of the relation of the parties. Any violation of the precepts of the Bible, on these points, is found to be a violation of the laws of nature, and certainly destructive. In like manner it is clear from the social nature of man, from the dependence of men upon each other, from the impossibility of attaining the end of our being in this world, otherwise than in society and under an ordered government, that it is the will of God that such society should exist. The design of God in this matter is as plain as in the constitution of the universe. We

might as well maintain that the laws of nature are the result of chance, or that marriage and parental authority have no other foundation than human law, as to assert that civil government has no firmer foundation than the will of man or the quicksands of expediency. By creating men social beings, and making it necessary for them to live in society, God has made his will as thus revealed the foundation of all civil government.

This doctrine is but one aspect of the comprehensive doctrine of Theism, a doctrine which teaches the existence of a personal God, a Spirit infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, justice, holiness, goodness and truth; a God who is everywhere present upholding and governing all his creatures and all their actions. The universe is not a machine left to go of itself. God did not at first create matter and impress upon it certain laws, and then leave it to their blind operation. He is everywhere present in the material world, not superseding secondary causes, but so upholding and guiding their operations, that the intelligence evinced is the omnipresent intelligence of God, and the power exercised is the *potestas ordinata* of the Great First Cause. He is no less supreme in his control of intelligent agents. They indeed are free, but not independent. They are governed in a manner consistent with their nature; yet God turns them as the rivers of waters are turned. All events depending on human agency are under his control. God is in history. Neither chance nor blind necessity determines the concatenation or issues of things. Nor is the world in the hands of its inhabitants. God has not launched our globe on the ocean of space, and left its multitudinous crew to direct its course without his interference. He

is at the helm. His breath fills the sails. His wisdom and power are pledged for the prosperity of the voyage. Nothing happens, even to the falling of a sparrow, which is not ordered by him. He works all things after the counsel of his will. It is by him that kings reign and princes decree justice. He puts down one, and raises up another. As he leads out the stars by night, marshalling them as a host, calling each one by its name, so does he order all human events. He raises up nations, and appoints the bounds of their habitation. He founds the empires of the earth, and determines their form and their duration. This doctrine of God's universal providence is the foundation of all religion. If this doctrine be not true, we are without God in the world. But if it is true, it involves a vast deal. God is every where in nature and in history. Every thing is a revelation of his presence and power. We are always in contact with him. Everything has a voice, which speaks of his goodness or his wrath. Fruitful seasons proclaim his goodness, famine and pestilence declare his displeasure. Nothing is by chance. The existence of any particular form of government is as much his work, as the rising of the sun or falling of the rain. It is something he has ordained for some wise purpose, and it is to be regarded as his work. If all events are under God's control, if it is by him that kings reign, then the actual possession of power is as much a revelation of his will that it should be obeyed, as the possession of wisdom or goodness is a manifestation of his will that those endowed with those gifts, should be revered and loved. It follows, therefore, from the universal providence of God, that "the powers that be are ordained of God." We have no more right to refuse obedience to an actually existing govern-

ment because it is not to our taste, or because we do not approve of its measures, than a child has the right to refuse to recognise a wayward parent; or a wife a capricious husband.

The religious character of our civil duties flows also from the comprehensive doctrine that the will of God is the ground of all moral obligation. To seek that ground either in "the reason and nature of things," or in expediency, is to banish God from the moral world, as effectually as the mechanical theory of the universe banishes him from the physical universe and from history. Our allegiance on that hypothesis is not to God but to reason or to society. This theory of morals therefore, changes the nature of religion and of moral obligation. It modifies and degrades all religious sentiment and exercises; it changes the very nature of sin, of repentance and obedience, and gives us, what is a perfect solecism, a religion without God. According to the Bible, our obligation to obey the laws of the land is not founded on the fact that the good of society requires such obedience or that it is a dictate of reason, but on the authority of God. It is part of the service which we owe to him. This must be so if the doctrine is true that God is our moral governor, to whom we are responsible for all our acts, and whose will is both the ground and the rule of all our obligations.

We need not, however, dwell longer on this subject. Although it has long been common to look upon civil government as a human institution, and to represent the consent of the governed as the only ground of the obligation of obedience, yet this doctrine is so notoriously of infidel origin, and so obviously in conflict with the teachings of the Bible, that it can have no hold on the

convictions of a Christian people. It is no more true of the state than it is of the family, or of the church. All are of divine institution. All have their foundation in his will. The duties belonging to each are enjoined by him and are enforced by his authority. Marriage is indeed a voluntary covenant. The parties select each other, and the state may make laws regulating the mode in which the contract shall be ratified; and determining its civil effects. It is, however, none the less an ordinance of God. The vows it includes are made to God; its sanction is found in his law; and its violation is not a mere breach of contract or disobedience to the civil law, but a sin against God. So with regard to the church, it is in one sense a voluntary society. No man can be forced by other men to join its communion. If done at all it must be done with his own consent, yet every man is under the strongest moral obligation to enter its fold. And when enrolled in the number of its members his obligation to obedience does not rest on his consent; it does not cease should that consent be withdrawn. It rests on the authority of the church as a divine institution. This is an authority no man can throw off. It presses him everywhere and at all times with the weight of a moral obligation. In a sense analogous to this the state is a divine institution. Men are bound to organize themselves into a civil government. Their obligation to obey its laws does not rest upon their compact in this case, any more than in the others above referred to. It is enjoined by God. It is a religious duty, and disobedience is a direct offence against him. The people have indeed the right to determine the form of government under which they are to live, and to modify it from time to time to suit

their changing condition. So, though to a less extent, or within narrower limits, they have a right to modify the form of their ecclesiastical governments, a right which every church has exercised, but the ground and nature of the obligation to obedience remains unchanged. This is not a matter of mere theory. It is of primary practical importance and has an all pervading influence on national character. Everything indeed connected with this subject depends on the answer to the question, Why are we obliged to obey the laws? If we answer because we made them; or because we assent to them, or framed the government which enacts them; or because the good of society enjoins obedience, or reason dictates it, then the state is a human institution; it has no religious sanction; it is founded on the sand; it ceases to have a hold on the conscience and to commend itself as a revelation of God to be revered and obeyed as a manifestation of his presence and will. But, on the other hand, if we place the state in the same category with the family and the church, and regard it as an institution of God, then we elevate it into a higher sphere; we invest it with religious sanctions and it becomes pervaded by a divine presence and authority, which immeasurably strengthens, while it elevates its power. Obedience for conscience sake is as different from obedience from fear, or from voluntary consent, or regard to human authority, as the divine from the human.

Such being, as we conceive, the true doctrine concerning the nature of the state, it is well to enquire into the necessary deductions from this doctrine. If government be a divine institution, and obedience to the laws a matter resting on the authority of God, it

might seem to follow that in no case could human laws be disregarded with a good conscience. This, as we have seen, is in fact the conclusion drawn from these premises by the advocates of the doctrine of "passive obedience." The command, however, to be subject to the higher powers is not more unlimited in its statement than the command, "children obey your parents in all things." From this latter command no one draws the conclusion that unlimited obedience is due from children to their parents. The true inference doubtless is, in both cases, that obedience is the rule and disobedience the exception. If in any instance a child refuse compliance with the requisition of a parent, or a citizen with the law of the land, he must be prepared to justify such disobedience at the bar of God. Even divine laws may in some cases be dispensed with. Those indeed which are founded on the nature of God, such as the command to love Him and our neighbour, are necessarily immutable. But those which are founded on the present constitution of things, though permanent as general rules of action, may on adequate grounds, be violated without sin. The commands, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, are all of permanent authority; and yet there may be justifiable homicide, and men may profane the sabbath and be blameless. In like manner the command to obey the laws, is a divine injunction, and yet there are cases in which disobedience is a duty. It becomes then of importance to determine what these cases are; or to ascertain the principles which limit the obedience which we owe to the state. It follows from the divine institution of government that its power is limited by the design of God in its institution, and by

the moral law. The family, the church and the state are all divine institutions, designed for specific purposes. Each has its own sphere, and the authority belonging to each is necessarily confined within its own province. The father appears in his household as its divinely appointed head. By the command of God all the members of that household are required to yield him reverence and obedience. But he cannot carry his parental authority into the church or the state; nor can he appear in his family as a magistrate or church officer. The obedience due to him is that which belongs to a father, and not to a civil or ecclesiastical officer, and his children are not required to obey him in either of those capacities. In like manner the officers of the church have within their sphere a divine right to rule, but they cannot claim civil authority on the ground of the general command to the people to obey those who have the care of souls. Heb. xiii. 17. As the church officer loses his power when he enters the forum; so does the civil magistrate when he enters the church. His right to rule is a right which belongs to him as representing God in the state—he has no commission to represent God either in the family or the church; and therefore, he is entitled to no obedience if he claims an authority which does not belong to him. This is a very obvious principle, and is of wide application. It not only limits the authority of civil officers to civil affairs, but limits the extent due to the obedience to be rendered even in civil matters to the officers of the state. A justice of the peace has no claim to the obedience due to a governor of a state; nor a governor of a state to that which belongs to the President of the Union; nor the President of the Union to that which may be rightfully

claimed by an absolute sovereign. A military commander has no authority over the community as a civil magistrate, nor can he exercise such authority even over his subordinates. This principle applies in all its force to the law-making power. The legislature cannot exercise any power which does not belong to them. They cannot act as judges or magistrates unless such authority has been actually committed to them. They are to be obeyed as legislators; and in any other capacity their decisions or commands do not bind the conscience. And still further, their legislative enactments have authority only when made in the exercise of their legitimate powers. In other words, an unconstitutional law is no law. If our Congress, for example, were to pass a bill creating an order of nobility, or an established church, or to change the religion of the land, or to enforce a sumptuary code, it would have no more virtue and be entitled to no more deference than a similar enactment intended to bind the whole country passed by a town council. This we presume will not be denied. God has committed unlimited power to no man and to no set of men, and the limitation which he has assigned to the power conferred, is to be found in the design for which it was given. That design is determined in the case of the family, the church and the state, by the nature of these institutions, by the general precepts of the Bible, or by the providence of God determining the peculiar constitution under which these organizations are called to act. The power of a parent was greater under the old dispensation than it is now; the legitimate authority of the church is greater under some modes of organization than under others; and the power of the state as represented in its constituted

authorities is far more extensive in some countries than in others. The theory of the British government is that the parliament is the whole state in convention, and therefore it exercises powers which do not belong to our congress, which represents the state only for certain specified purposes. These diversities, however, do not alter the general principle, which is that rulers are to be obeyed in the exercise of their legitimate authority; that their commands or requirements beyond their appropriate spheres are void of all binding force. This is a principle which no one can dispute.

A second principle is no less plain. No human authority can make it obligatory on us to commit sin. If all power is of God it cannot be legitimately used against God. This is a dictate of natural conscience, and is authenticated by the clearest teachings of the word of God. The apostles when commanded to abstain from preaching Christ, refused to obey, and said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." No human law could make it binding on the ministers of the gospel in our day to withhold the message of salvation from their fellow men. It requires no argument to prove that men cannot make it right to worship idols, to blaspheme God, to deny Christ. It is sheer fanaticism thus to exalt the power of the government above the authority of God. This would be to bring back upon us some of the worst doctrines of the middle ages as to the power of the pope and of earthly sovereigns. Good men in all ages of the world have always acted on the principle that human laws cannot bind the conscience when they are in conflict with the law of God. Daniel openly in the sight even of his enemies, prayed

to the God of heaven in despite of the prohibition of his sovereign. Shadrach, Mesheck and Abednego refused to bow down, at the command of the king, to the golden image. The early Christians disregarded all those laws of Pagan Rome, requiring them to do homage to false Gods. Protestants with equal unanimity refused to submit to the laws of their papal sovereigns enjoining the profession of Romish errors. That these men were right no man, with an enlightened conscience, can deny; but they were right only on the principle that the power of the state and of the magistrate is limited by the law of God. It follows then from the divine institution of government that its power to bind the conscience to obedience is limited by the design of its appointment and the moral law. All its power being from God, it must be subordinate to him. This is a doctrine which, however for a time and in words, it may be denied, is too plain and too important not to be generally recognised. It is a principle too which should at all times be publicly avowed. The very sanctity of human laws requires it. Their real power and authority lie in their having a divine sanction. To claim for them binding force when destitute of such sanction, is to set up a mere semblance for a reality, a suit of armour with no living man within. The stability of human government and the authority of civil laws require that they should be kept within the sphere where they repose on God, and are pervaded by his presence and power. Without him nothing human can stand. All power is of God; and if of God, divine; and if divine, in accordance with his holy law.

But who are the judges of the application of these principles? Who is to determine whether a particular

law, is unconstitutional or immoral? So far as the mere constitutionality of a law is concerned, it may be remarked, that there is in most states, as in our own, for example, a regular judicial tribunal to which every legislative enactment can be submitted, and the question of its conformity to the constitution authoritatively decided. In all ordinary cases, that is, in all cases not involving some great principle or some question of conscience, such decisions must be held to be final, and to bind all concerned not only to submission but obedience. A law thus sanctioned becomes instinct with all the power of the State, and further opposition brings the recusants into conflict with the government; a conflict in which no man for light reasons can with a good conscience engage. Still it cannot be denied, and ought not to be concealed, that the ultimate decision must be referred to every man's own judgment. This is a necessary deduction from the doctrine that obedience to law is a religious duty. It is a primary principle that the right of private judgment extends over all questions of faith and morals. No human power can come between God and the conscience. Every man must answer for his own sins, and therefore every man must have the right to determine for himself what is sin. As he cannot transfer his responsibility, he cannot transfer his right of judgment. This principle has received the sanction of good men in every age of the world. Daniel judged for himself of the binding force of the command not to worship the true God. So did the apostles when they continued to preach Christ, in opposition to all the constituted authorities. The laws passed by Pagan Rome requiring the worship of idols had the sanction of all the authorities of the empire, yet on the ground of their private

judgment the Christians refused to obey them. Protestants in like manner refused to obey the laws of Papal Rome, though sustained by all the authority both of the church and state. In all these cases the right of private judgment cannot be disputed. Even where no question of religion or morality is directly concerned, this right is undeniable. Does any one now condemn Hampden for refusing to pay "ship-money?" Does any American condemn our ancestors for resisting the stamp-act though the authorities of St. Stephens and Westminster united in pronouncing the imposition unconstitutional? However this principle may be regarded when stated in the abstract, every individual instinctively acts upon it in his own case. Whenever a command is issued by one in authority over us, we immediately and almost unconsciously determine for ourselves, first, whether he had a right to give the order; and secondly, whether it can with a good conscience be obeyed. If this decision is clearly in the negative, we at once determine to refuse obedience on our own responsibility. Let any man test this point by an appeal to his own consciousness. Let him suppose the President of the United States to order him to turn Romanist or Pagan; or Congress to pass a bill requiring him to blaspheme God; or a military superior to command him to commit treason or murder—does not his conscience tell him he would on the instant refuse? Would he, or could he wait until the constitutionality of such requisition had been submitted to the courts? or if the courts should decide against him, would that at all alter the case? Men must be strangely oblivious of the relation of the soul to God, the instinctive sense which we possess of our allegiance to him, and of the self-evidencing

power with which his voice reaches the reason and the conscience, to question the necessity which every man is under to decide all questions touching his duty to God for himself.

It may indeed be thought that this doctrine is subversive of the authority of government. A moment's reflection is sufficient to dispel this apprehension. The power of laws rests on two foundations, fear and conscience. Both are left by this doctrine in their integrity. The former, because the man refuses obedience at his peril. His private conviction that the law is unconstitutional or immoral does not abrogate it, or impede its operation. If arraigned for its violation, he may plead in his justification his objections to the authority of the law. If these objections are found valid by the competent authorities, he is acquitted; if otherwise, he suffers the penalty. What more can the State ask? All the power the State, as such, can give its laws, lies in their penalty. A single decision by the ultimate authority in favour of a law, is a revelation to the whole body of the people that it cannot be violated with impunity. The sword of justice hangs over every transgressor. The motive of fear in securing obedience, is therefore, as operative under this view of the subject, as it can be under any other. What, however, is of far more consequence, the power of conscience is left in full force. Obedience to the law is a religious duty, enjoined by the word of God and enforced by conscience. If, in any case, it be withheld, it is under a sense of responsibility to God; and under the conviction that if this conscientious objection be feigned, it aggravates the guilt of disobedience as a sin against God an hundred fold; and if it be mistaken, it affords no palliation of the offence.

Paul was guilty in persecuting the church, though he thought he was doing God service. And the man, who by a perverted conscience, is led to refuse obedience to righteous law, stands without excuse at the bar of God. The moral sanction of civil laws, which gives them their chief power and without which they must ultimately become inoperative, cannot possibly extend further than this. For what is that moral sanction? It is a conviction that our duty to God requires our obedience; but how can we feel that duty to God requires us to do what God forbids? In other words, a law which we regard as immoral, cannot present itself to the conscience as having divine authority. Conscience, therefore, is on the side of the law wherever and whenever this is possible from the nature of the case. It is a contradiction to say that conscience enforces what conscience condemns. This then is all the support which laws of the land can possibly derive from our moral convictions. The allegiance of conscience is to God. It enforces obedience to all human laws consistent with that allegiance; further than this it cannot by possibility go. And as the decisions of conscience are, by the constitution of our nature, determined by our own apprehensions of the moral law, and not by authority, it follows of necessity that every man must judge for himself, and on his own responsibility, whether any given law of man conflicts with the law of God or not.

We would further remark on this point that the lives and property of men have no greater protection than that which, on this theory, is secured for the laws of the state. The law of God says: Thou shalt not kill. Yet every man does, and must judge when and how far this law binds his conscience. It is admitted, on all hands,

that there are cases in which its obligation ceases. What those cases are each man determines for himself. but under his two fold responsibility to his country and to God. If through passion or any other cause, he errs as to what constitutes justifiable homicide, he must bear the penalty attached to murder by the law of God and man. It is precisely so in the case before us. God has commanded us to obey the magistrate as his minister and representative. If we err in our judgment as to the cases in which that command ceases to be binding, we fall into the hands of justice both human and divine. Can more than this be necessary? Can any thing be gained by trying to make God require us to break his own commands? Can conscience be made to sanction the violation of the moral law? Is not this the way to destroy all moral distinctions, and to prostrate the authority of conscience, and with it the very foundation of civil government? Is not all history full of the dreadful consequences of the doctrine that human laws can make sin obligatory, and that those in authority can judge for the people what is sin? What more than this is needed to justify all the persecutions for righteousness sake since the world began? What hope could there be, on this ground, for the preservation of religion or virtue in any nation on the earth? If the principle be once established that the people are bound to obey all human laws, or that they are not to judge for themselves when their duty to God requires them to refuse such obedience, then there is not only an end of all civil and religious liberty, but the very nature of civil government as a divine institution is destroyed. It becomes first atheistical, and then diabolical. Then the massacre of St. Bartholomew's, the decrees of the

French National Assembly, and the laws of Pagan Rome against Christians, and of its Papal successor against Protestants, were entitled to reverent obedience. Then too may any infidel party which gains the ascendancy in a state, as has happened of late in Switzerland, render it morally obligatory upon all ministers to close their churches, and on the people to renounce the gospel. This is not an age or state of the world in which to advance such doctrines. There are too many evidences of the gathering powers of evil to render it expedient to exalt the authority of man above that of God, or emancipate men from subjection to their Master in heaven, that they may become more obedient to their masters on earth. We are advocating the cause of civil government, of the stability and authority of human laws, when we make every thing rest on the authority of God, and when we limit every human power by subordinating it to him. We hold, therefore, that it is not only one of the plainest principles of morals that no immoral law can bind the conscience, and that every man must judge of its character for himself and on his own responsibility, but that this doctrine is essential to all religious liberty and to the religious sanction of civil government. If you deny this principle, you thereby deny that government is a divine institution, and denying that, you deprive it of its vital energy, and send it tottering to a dishonoured grave.

But here the great practical question arises, What is to be done when the law of the land comes into conflict with the law of God—or, which is to us the same thing, with our convictions of what that law demands? In answer to this question we would remark, in the first place, that in most cases the majority of the people

have nothing to do, except peaceably to use their influence to have the law repealed. This mass of the people have nothing actively to do with the laws. Very few enactments of the government touch one in a thousand in the population. We may think a protective tariff not only inexpedient, but unequal and therefore unjust. But we have nothing to do with it. We are not responsible for it, and are not called upon to enforce it. This remark applies even to laws of a higher character, such, e. g. as a law proclaiming an unjust war; forbidding the introduction of the Bible into public schools; requiring homage or sanction to be given to idolatrous services by public officers, &c., &c. Such laws do not touch the mass of the people. They do not require them either to do, or to abstain from doing, anything which conscience forbids or enjoins; and therefore their duty in the premises may be limited to the use of legitimate means to have laws of which they disapprove repealed. .

In the second place, those executive officers who are called upon to carry into effect a law which requires them to do what their conscience condemns, must resign their office, if they would do their duty to God. Some years since, General Maitland (if we remember correctly) of the Madras Presidency, in India, resigned a lucrative and honourable post, because he could not conscientiously give the sanction to the Hindu idolatry required by the British authorities. And within the last few months, we have seen hundreds of Hessian officers throw up their commissions rather than trample on the constitution of their country. On the same principle the non-conformists in the time of Charles II. and the ministers of the Free Church of Scotland, in

our day, gave up their stipends and their position, because they could not with a good conscience carry into effect the law of the land. It is not intended that an executive officer should, in all cases, resign his post rather than execute a law which in his private judgment he may regard as unconstitutional or unjust. The responsibility attaches to those who make, and not to those who execute the laws. It is only when the act, which the officer is called upon to perform, involves personal criminality, that he is called upon to decline its execution. Thus in the case of war; a military officer is not the proper judge of its justice. This is not a question between him and the enemy, but between his government and the hostile nation. On the supposition that war itself is not sinful, the act which the military officer is called upon to perform is not criminal, and he may with a good conscience carry out the commands of his government, whatever may be his private opinion of the justice of the war. All such cases no doubt are more or less complicated, and must be decided each on its own merits. The general principle, however, appears plain, that it is only when the act required of an executive officer involves personal criminality, that he is called upon to resign. This is a case that often occurs. In Romish countries, as Malta, for example, British officers have been required to do homage to the host, and on their refusal have been cashiered. An instance of this kind occurred a few years ago, and produced a profound sensation in England. This was clearly a case of great injustice. The command was an unrighteous one. The duty of the officer was to resign rather than obey. Had the military authorities taken a fair view of the question, they must have de-

cided that the command to bow to the host, was not obligatory, because *ultra vires*. But if such an order was insisted upon, the conscientious Protestant must resign his commission.

The next question is, What is the duty of private citizens in the case supposed, i. e. when the civil law either forbids them to do what God commands, or commands them to do what God forbids? We answer, their duty is not obedience, but submission. These are different things. A law consists of two parts, the precept and the penalty. We obey the one, and submit to the other. When we are required by the law to do what our conscience pronounces to be sinful, we cannot obey the precept, but we are bound to submit without resistance to the penalty. We are not authorised to abrogate the law; nor forcibly to resist its execution, no matter how great its injustice or cruelty. On this principle holy men have acted in all ages. The apostles did not obey the precept of the Jewish laws forbidding them to preach Christ, but neither did they resist the execution of the penalty attached to the violation of those laws. Thus it was with all the martyrs, they would not offer incense to idols, but refused not to be led to the stake. Had Cranmer, on the ground of the iniquity of the law condemning him to death, killed the officers who came to carry it into effect, he would have been guilty of murder. Here is the great difference which is often overlooked. The right of self-defence is appealed to as justifying resistance even to death against all attempts to deprive us of our liberty. We have this right in reference to unauthorized individuals, but not in reference to the officers of the law. Had men without authority entered Cranmer's house

pur attempted to take his life, his resistance, even if attended with the loss of life, would have been justifiable. But no man has the right to resist the execution of the law. What could be more iniquitous than the laws condemning men to death for the worship of God. Yet to these laws Christians and Protestants yielded unresisting submission. This is an obvious duty flowing from the divine institution of government. There is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. Thus Paul reasoned. If the power is of God, it cannot be rightfully resisted; it must be obeyed or submitted to. Are wicked, tyrannical, pagan powers of God? Certainly they are. Does not he order all things? Does any man become a king without God's permission granted in mercy or in judgment? Was not Nero to be recognised as emperor? Would it not be a sin to refuse submission to Nicholas of Russia, or to the Sultan of Turkey? Are rulers to be obeyed only for their goodness? Is it only kind and reasonable masters, parents, or husbands who are to be recognised as such? It is no doubt true that in no case is unlimited authority granted to men; and that obedience to the precepts of our superiors is limited by the nature of their office, and by the moral law; but this leaves their authority untouched, and the obligation to submission where we cannot obey, unimpaired.

Have we then got back to the old doctrine of "passive obedience" by another route? Not at all. The scriptural rule above recited relates to individuals. It prescribes the duty of submission even to unjust and

wicked laws on the part of men in their separate capacity; but it does not deny the right of revolution as existing in the community. What the scriptures forbid is that any man should undertake to resist the law. They do not forbid either change in the laws or change in the government. There is an obvious difference between these two things, viz. the right of resistance on the part of individuals, and the right of revolution on the part of the people. The latter right we argue from the divine institution of government itself. God has revealed his will that government should exist, but he has not prescribed the form which it shall assume. In other words, he has commanded men to organize such government, but has left the form to be determined by themselves. This is a necessary inference. It follows from the mere silence of scripture and nature on this subject, that it is left free to the determination of those to whom the general command is given. In the next place, this right is to be inferred from the design of civil government. That design is the welfare of the people. It is the promotion of their physical and moral improvement; the security of life and property; the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of those who do well. If such is the end which God designs government to answer, it must be his will that it should be made to accomplish that purpose, and consequently that it may be changed from time to time so as to secure that end. No one form of government is adapted to all states of society, any more than one suit of clothes is proper to all stages of life. The end for which clothing is designed, supposes the right to adapt it to that end. In like manner the end government is intended to answer, supposes the right to modify it whenever

such modification is necessary. If God commands men to accomplish certain ends, and does not prescribe the means, he does thereby leave the choice of the means to their discretion. And any institution which fails to accomplish the end intended by it, if it has not a divine sanction as to its form, may lawfully be so changed as to suit the purpose for which it was appointed. We hold therefore that the people have by divine right the authority to change, not only their rulers but their form of government, whenever the one or the other, instead of promoting the well-being of the community, is unjust or injurious. This is a right which, like all other prerogatives, may be exercised unwisely, capriciously, or even unjustly, but still it is not to be denied. It has been recognised and exercised in all ages of the world, and with the sanction of the best of men. It is as unavoidable and healthful as the changes in the body to adapt it to the increasing vigour of the mind, in its progress from infancy to age. The progress of society depends on the exercise of this right. It is impossible that its powers should be developed, if it were to be forever wrapt up in its swaddling clothes, or confined as a mummy. The early Christians submitted quietly to the unjust laws of their Pagan oppressors, until the mass of the community become Christians, and then they revolutionized the government. Protestants acted in the same way with their papal rulers. So did our forefathers, and so may any people whose form of government no longer answers the end for which God has commanded civil government to be instituted. The Quakers are now a minority in all the countries in which they exist, and furnish an edifying example of submission to laws which they cannot conscientiously

obey. But should they come, in any political society, to be the controlling power, it is plain they would have the right to conduct it on their own principles.

The right of revolution therefore is really embedded in the right to serve God. A government which interferes with that service, which commands what God forbids, or forbids what he commands, we are bound by our duty to him to change as soon as we have the power. If this is not so, then God has subjected his people to the necessity of always submitting to punishment for obeying his commands, and has cut them off from the only means which can secure their peaceful and secure enjoyment of the liberty to do his will. No one, however, in our land, or of the race to which we belong, will be disposed to question the right of the people to change their form of government. Our history forbids all diversity of sentiment on this subject. We are only concerned to show that the scriptural doctrine of civil government is perfectly consistent with that right; or rather that the right is one of the logical deductions from that doctrine.

We have thus endeavoured to prove that government is a divine institution; that obedience to the laws is a religious duty; that such obedience is due in all cases in which it can be rendered with a good conscience; that when obedience cannot be yielded without sinning against God, then our duty as individuals is quietly to submit to the infliction of the penalty attached to disobedience; and that the right of resistance or of revolution rests only in the body of people for whose benefit government is instituted.

The application of these principles to the case of the fugitive slave law is so obvious, as hardly to justify

remark. The great body of the people regard that law as consistent with the constitution of the country and the law of God. Their duty, therefore, in the premises, whether they think it wise or unwise, is perfectly plain. Those who take the opposite view of the law, having in the great majority of cases, nothing to do with enforcing it, are in no measure responsible for it. Their duty is limited to the use of peaceable and constitutional means to get it repealed. A large part of the people of this country thought the acquisition of Louisiana; the admission of Texas into the union by a simple resolution; the late Mexican war; were either unjust or unconstitutional, but there was no resistance to these measures. None was made, and none would have been justifiable. So in the present case, as the people generally are not called upon either to do, or to forbear from doing, anything their conscience forbids, all resistance to the operation of this law on their part must be without excuse. With regard to the executive officers, whose province it is to carry the law into effect, though some of them may disapprove of it as unwise, harsh or oppressive, still they are bound to execute it, unless they believe the specific act which they are called upon to perform involves personal criminality, and then their duty is the resignation of their office, and not resistance to the law. There is the most obvious difference between an officer being called upon to execute a decision of a court, which in his private opinion he thinks unjust, and his being called upon to blaspheme, or commit murder. The latter involves personal guilt, the former does not. He is not the judge of the equity or propriety of the decision which he is required to carry into effect. It is evident that the wheels of society would be stopt if

every officer of the government, and every minister of justice should feel that he is authorized to sit in judgment on the wisdom or righteousness of any law he was called upon to execute. He is responsible for his own acts, and not for the judgments of others, and therefore when the execution of a law or of a command of a superior does not require him to sin, he is free to obey.

Again, in those cases in which we, as private individuals, may be called upon to assist in carrying the fugitive slave law into effect, if we cannot obey, we must do as the Quakers have long done with regard to our military laws, i. e. quietly submit. We have no right to resist, or in any way to impede the operation of the law. Whatever sin there is in it, does not rest on us, any more than the sin of our military system rests on the Quakers.*

And finally, as regards the fugitives themselves, their obvious duty is submission. To them the law must appear just as the laws of the Pagans against Christians, or of Romanists against Protestants, appeared to those who suffered from them. And the duty in both cases is the same. Had the martyrs put to death the officers of the law, they would in the sight of God and man been guilty of murder. And any one who teaches fugi-

* The doctrine that the executive officers of a government are not the responsible judges of the justice of its decisions, is perfectly consistent with the principle advanced above, viz., that every man has the right to judge for himself whether any law or command is obligatory. This latter principle relates to acts for which we are personally responsible. If a military officer is commanded to commit treason or murder, he is bound to refuse; because these acts are morally wrong. But if commanded to lead an army against an enemy he is bound to obey, for that is not morally wrong. He is the judge of his own act, but not of the act of the government in declaring the war. So a sheriff, if he thinks all capital punishment a violation of God's law, he cannot carry a sentence of death into effect, because the act itself is sinful in his view. But he is not the judge of the justice of any particular sentence he is called on to execute. He may judge of his own part of the transaction; but he is not responsible for the act of the judge and the jury.

tive slaves to resort to violence even to the sacrifice of life, in resisting the law in question, it seems to us, is guilty of exciting men to murder. As before remarked, the principle of self-defence does not apply in this case. Is there no difference between a man who kills an assassin who attempts his life on the highway, and the man who, though knowing himself to be innocent of the crime for which he has been condemned to die, should kill the officers of justice? The former is a case of justifiable homicide, the other is a case of murder. The officers of justice are not the offenders. They are not the persons responsible for the law or the decision. That responsibility rests on the government. Private vengeance cannot reach the State. And if it could, such vengeance is not the remedy ordained by God for such evils. They are to be submitted to, until the government can be changed. How did our Lord act when he was condemned by an oppressive judgment, and with wicked hands crucified and slain? Did he kill the Roman soldiers? Has he not left us an example that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself unto him that judgeth righteously. On this principle did all his holy martyrs act; and on this principle are we bound to act in submitting to the laws of the land, even when we deem them oppressive or unjust.

The principles advocated in this paper appear to us so elementary, that we feel disposed to apologize for presenting them in such a formal manner. But every generation has to learn the alphabet for itself. And the mass of men are so occupied with other matters,

that they do not give themselves time to discriminate. Their judgments are dictated, in many cases, by their feelings, or their circumstances. One man simply looks to the hardship of forcing a slave back to bondage, and he impulsively counsels resistance unto blood. Another looks to the evils which follow from resistance to law, and he asserts that human laws are in all cases to be obeyed. Both are obviously wrong. Both would overthrow all government. The one by justifying every man's taking the law into his own hands; and the other by destroying the authority of God, which is the only foundation on which human government can rest. It is only by acting on the direction of the Divine Wisdom incarnate: "Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" that these destructive extremes are to be avoided. Government is a divine institution; obedience to the laws is commanded by God; and yet like all other divine commands of the same class, there are cases in which it ceases to be obligation. Of these cases every one must judge for himself on his own responsibility to God and man; but when he cannot obey, his duty is to submit. The divinely appointed remedy for unjust or oppressive legislation is not private or tumultuous opposition, but the repeal of unrighteous enactments, or the reorganization of the government.

What, however, we have had most at heart in the preparation of this article, is the exhibition of the great principle that all authority reposes on God; that all our obligations terminate on him; that government is not a mere voluntary compact, nor obedience to law an obligation which rests on the consent of the governed. We regard this as a matter of primary importance.

The character of men and of communities depends, to a great extent on their faith. The theory of morals which they adopt determines their moral character. If they assume that expediency is the rule of duty, that a thing is right because it produces happiness, or wrong because it produces misery, that this tendency is not merely the test between right and wrong, but the ground of the distinction, then, the specific idea of moral excellence and obligation is lost. All questions of duty are merged into a calculation of profit and loss. There is no sense of God; reason or society takes his place, and an irreligious, calculating cast of character is the inevitable result. This is counteracted in individuals and the community by various causes, for neither the character of a man nor that of a society is determined by any one opinion; but its injurious influence may nevertheless be most manifest and deplorable. No man can fail to see the deteriorating influence of this theory of morals on public character both in this country and in England. If we would make men religious and moral, instead of merely cute, let us place God before them; let us teach them that his will is the ground of their obligations; that they are responsible to him for all their acts; that their allegiance as moral agents is not to reason or to society, but to the heart-searching God! that the obligation to obey the laws of the land does not rest on their consent to them, but to the fact that government is of God; that those who resist the magistrate, resist the ordinance of God, and that they who resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. This is the only doctrine which can give stability either to morals or to government. Man's allegiance is not to reason in the abstract, nor to society, but to a

personal God, who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell. This is a law revealed in the constitution of our nature, as well as by the lips of Christ. And to no other sovereign can the soul yield rational obedience. We might as well attempt to substitute some mechanical contrivance of our own, for the law of gravitation, as a means of keeping the planets in their orbits, as to expect to govern men by any thing else than the fear of an Infinite God.



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